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SUBJECT: ARMENIA: OPINION POLL ON N-K SETTLEMENT, POLITICS
AND IRAN

REF: A) YEREVAN 688 B) YEREVAN 715

Classified By: DCM A.F.Godfrey for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) The vast majority of Armenians believe it is important to solve the problems related to Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) in the "near future," according to the results of a May 2006 Gallup poll commissioned by the International Republican Institute (IRI). The poll results also demonstrated that, while a sizeable chunk of the population of Armenia is interested in politics, the public does not have confidence in government institutions, political parties, or the National Assembly. Survey respondents shared their thoughts on Iran, which ranked third on a list of the most important partners for Armenia (the United States ranked a distant fifth). The Ambassador prepared for the visit of the Minsk Group and Assistant Secretary Daniel Fried by sharing the poll results related to N-K with President Robert Kocharian in a May 24 meeting. He explained that the Armenian public strongly supported a negotiated settlement on N-K. Kocharian said the poll was a useful tool, and reiterated his support for our democracy assistance program. End Summary.

POLLING DATA SHOWS PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR SETTLEMENT

2. (C) Ninety-seven percent of Armenians polled in an IRI-Gallup survey said it was important to solve the problems related to N-K in the "near future." (Note: The Gallup Organization surveyed 1,200 eligible voters, aged 18 years and over, between April 30 and May 7. According to IRI and the Gallup Organization, the margin of error was not more than three percent. End Note.) The survey group overwhelmingly preferred a peaceful solution, and most thought a resolution without force was possible. Eighty-five percent of respondents said the N-K situation should be resolved through negotiations and peaceful means, while only thirteen percent said force should be used if necessary. Encouragingly, seventy-one percent said a peaceful settlement was "definitely possible" or "probably possible."

3. (C) Not surprisingly, the respondents' optimism about a potential peaceful resolution to the N-K conflict did not translate into flexibility on the future status of N-K. No one surveyed said N-K should become part of Azerbaijan. Forty-one percent said N-K should become part of Armenia, thirty-one percent said it should be an autonomous region of Armenia, and twenty-seven percent said it should be an independent country.

POLL SEEKS TO CREAT ISSUE-BASED PUBLIC DEBATE

4. (C) The Ambassador briefed Kocharian on an edited version of the IRI-Gallup poll the day before the visit to Armenia of the Minsk Group and A/S Fried. He explained that there was strong support for a negotiated settlement on N-K and that the Armenian people were optimistic Kocharian would succeed on a political resolution. The Ambassador told the president that the intent of the poll was to refocus political debate from personalities to issues. He also stressed that the poll was part of our election preparation strategy, which Kocharian had agreed to support. (Note: The poll corresponds to the "polling capacity" bullet on the Embassy's Election-Related Assistance plan, which calls for developing the capacity of polling firms and supporting the conduct of polls. The Armenian Sociological Association conducted the fieldwork on behalf of the Gallup Organization. End Note.)

KOCHARIAN CALLS POLL "USEFUL"

5. (C) Kocharian said the poll was a useful product. He noted that he did not trust local polls, whose results he

maintained were not based on real fieldwork, but were influenced by bribery. He also reiterated support for our election preparation strategy.

ARMENIANS INTERESTED IN POLITICS, LACK FAITH IN INSTITUTIONS

16. (C) Sixty-four percent of respondents said they had "medium interest" or "high interest" in politics, and seventy-two percent said they would "probably" or "definitely" vote, with an additional eight percent undecided. Of those who said they planned to vote, nearly two-thirds said they felt voting was their duty, and eighteen percent said they planned to vote in the hopes that their participation would lessen the likelihood of fraud. Political institutions ranked lowest on a list of institutions in which the population is confident. The Armenian army tied for second with the Commonwealth of Independent States, with a confidence rating of eighty-three percent. The European Union was first. The National Assembly ranked dead last, with a thirty-one-percent confidence rating. Political parties came in just above the National Assembly, and the Cabinet of Ministers just above the parties, with a thirty-three-percent confidence rating. The Armenian media had a confidence rating of sixty-seven percent, while the president's office only enjoyed the confidence of thirty-five percent of respondents.

IRAN A BETTER PARTNER THAN THE UNITED STATES

17. (C) Iran ranked third on a list of the most important partners for Armenia, behind Russia and France. The United States came in a distant fifth. Half of respondents said Iran was an important partner, and just over one-third felt the United States was an important partner. Nineteen percent said the United States constitutes a threat to Armenia, but only seven percent said Iran was a threat. Correspondingly, eighty-six percent of respondents said Armenia had good relations with Iran, while nine percent said relations were bad. In contrast, sixty-seven percent said Armenia had a good relationship with the United States, while eighteen percent said relations were bad.

... BUT IT STILL SHOULDN'T HAVE NUKES

18. (C) Fifty-seven percent of respondents said they agreed with efforts by the U.S., European Union, and Russia to prevent Iran's development of nuclear weapons, and 27 percent said they disagreed.

COMMENT

19. (C) Kocharian is well-positioned to negotiate an N-K settlement. The IRI-Gallup survey results offer him solid, credible evidence of support and good cover for a peaceful resolution. Opposition leaders continue to tell us that they will not stand in the way of a settlement, leaving the door open for Kocharian to make a deal. The statistics on Armenian-Iranian relations support our observations: Armenians rely on their lifeline to the south (ref B).
EVANS